DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 309 HE 028 778

AUTHOR Feldmann, Shirley; Martinez-Pons, Manuel
TITLE Multiple Role Conflict and Graduate Students' Academic Performance.
PUB DATE Oct 95
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New England Psychological Association (Wenham, MA, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Adult Students; Anxiety; Coping; *Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Role Conflict; *Self Efficacy; Self Evaluation (Individuals)
IDENTIFIERS *Self Regulation

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of multiple social roles on the psychological functioning of 60 adult students (age 25 to 51 years) in an introductory graduate course in educational research. Using multiple role conflict (MRC), perceived ability to cope (PAC), subject anxiety (SA), academic self-efficacy (SE), self-regulation (SR), and course performance (CP) tests administered over the course of the semester, it found significant correlations among these variables. The study discovered that SR exerted a positive effect on CP, and that SE exerted a positive effect on SR. MRC proved to exert a significant negative effect on SE. These findings point to important issues regarding cognitive and behavioral consequences of multiple social role conflict among adult students. (Contains 11 references.) (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 390 309

Multiple Role Conflict and Graduate Students' Academic Performance

Shirley Feldmann Ph.D.

Graduate School and University Center of the

City University of New York

Manuel Martinez-Pons, Ph.D.

Brooklyn College of the

City University of New York

Abstract

Graduate students' academic self-regulation was found to positively affect their performance in a course in research, and to be in turn positively affected by their academic self-efficacy (SE). However, conflict experienced in performing multiple social roles exerted a negative effect on SE. Implications and recommendations for further study were discussed.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Shirley Feldmann

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

NE0227720

A paper presented at the 1995 Annual Meeting of the New England Psychological Association, Wenham, Massachusetts

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Multiple Role Conflict and Graduate Students' Academic Performance

During the past two decades, social scientists have been concerned with the effect that multiple social roles (e.g., working, being a spouse, being a parent) have on adult psychological functioning. Early writers, espousing an "energy consuming" view, hypothesized a positive relation between multiple social roles (MSR) and strain (Goode, 1960; Merton, 1968). More recently, however, other workers, adhering to an alternative, "energy creating" position, have theorized that as the number of roles increases, psychological well-being also increases (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Waldron, 1989). Reasons that have been suggested for the hypothesized beneficial effects of MSR have been higher self-esteem (Pietromonaco et al., 1986) and lower health risks due to increased activity (Verbrugge, 1983). To date, research findings regarding these opposing views have been inconsistent. On the one hand, Piechowski (1992) and Marlow (1993) found that negative mental health outcomes resulted from multiple role demands. On the other, Sprietzer (1979) and Waldron (1989) found that well-being increased with the number of multiple roles enacted. One possible reason for these inconsistent findings is the subjective nature of the dependent variables typically used (e.g., self-reports on stress, self-esteem, career satisfaction, pleasure, depression and feelings of general well-being), which may have had different meanings for different groups (Pietromonaco et al, 1986). A second possible reason is that the studies have typically examined the *number of roles played,* without considering variability in the respondents' *ability to cope* with the challenges involved (Baruch & Barnett, 1986).

This investigation examined the effect of MSR on psychological functioning while seeking to overcome these limitations. The population studied was that of adult learners in graduate school. The reason for this choice of population was threefold: First, the issues associated with MSR are especially relevant for members of this group, since their graduate student status adds significantly to other social demands they may already face. Second, the academic performance level of the participants was seen as an important form of personal functioning that is directly observable. Third, the use of a formal learning setting afforded the opportunity to examine the degree to which key cognitive processes intervene between the multiple role experience and the outcome measure of personal functioning.

Theoretical Model

The model of the present study appears in Figure 1. In this structure, *conflict experienced in managing multiple roles* (MRC) was hypothesized to negatively affect *perceived ability to cope with multiple roles (PAC)* and these two variables were in turn hypothesized to negatively affect *course performance (CP)*, or academic achievement. *Subject anxiety (SA)* related to taking a graduate course in research was hypothesized to vary as a

function of multiple role processes, and it was in turn assumed to contribute to deficit in CP. Anxiety has been found to negatively affect academic performance (Sarason et al., 1960) and control for its possible role relative to the present issues was deemed important. Finally, *academic self-efficacy (SE)* and *academic self-regulation (SR)* were included as mediators between *multiple role processes*, SA and CP. SE and SR have been found to be powerful predictors of academic achievement among secondary school students (Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1992), and it was deemed relevant to assess their mediating effects within the context of the present model of multiple roles among adults.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 60 students in an introductory graduate course in educational research. The participants were elementary school teachers taking part in a Masters program in Education in a large urban university. Approximately 95% were female and 5% were male, and their ages ranged between 25 and 51 years. The ethnic composition of the sample was 75% White, non-Hispanic; 15% Black; 10% Hispanic; and 5% Asian.

Measures and Instrumentation

Multiple role conflict (MRC) was measured with a questionnaire item that asked, "How much conflict do you experience in performing the roles that face adults today (e.g., being a parent, a spouse, an adult student, an employee, a caregiver to an elderly parent)?". The response format involved a Likert-type scale ranging between 1 ("I experience no conflict at all") and 7 ("I experience great conflict"). Test-retest reliability (two-week interval) for this item was $r = .69$, $p < .05$. *Perceived ability to cope with multiple role conflict (PAC)* was also measured by means of a questionnaire item. This item asked, "How well can you deal with the conflict involved in performing the roles that face adults today (e.g., being a parent, a spouse, an adult student, an employee, a caregiver to an elderly parent)?". The response format involved a Likert-type scale ranging between 1 ("Not at all well) and 7 ("Extremely well"). The test-retest reliability of the item (two-week interval) was $r = .65$, $p < .05$. *Subject anxiety (SA)* was assessed with an experimental questionnaire developed for the study. It consists of 10 items, e.g., "being bothered by the idea of taking a course in research", "research making me feel uneasy and confused". The response format ranged between 1 ("This is not at all true of me") and 7 ("This is very true of me"). The internal consistency reliability of the SA scale was tested with 30 graduate students matched to those in the present sample; for this instrument, KR20 = .81. *Subject self-efficacy (SE)* was also assessed with an experimental questionnaire. The scale consists of 12 items addressing the various components of the research course

at hand, e.g., reviewing the professional literature to identify topical problems for research in Education, and using the computer to perform statistical analysis of data. For each item, the respondent is asked to indicate how confident he/she is that he/she can master, within the time allotted for the course, the aspect of research involved. The response format for this scale ranges between 1 ("Not at all confident") and 7 ("Extremely confident"). For the SE scale, KR20 = .91. *Self-regulation (SR)* was assessed with an experimental questionnaire adapted from Zimmerman et. al (1992). The instrument is made up of 12 items dealing with different forms of academic self-regulation, e.g., "studying when there are other interesting things to do" and "planning your schoolwork". For this instrument, KR20 = .85. *Course performance* was assessed with a test developed to assess mastery of material covered in the course. The course took a mastery learning approach, and a score equal to or above 70% was used as the passing criterion.

Procedure

The MRC and PAC scales were administered on the first day of class, after students' participation was secured, and after they were informed of APA standards for the protection of research subjects. The SA and SE scales were adminstered one week into the semester, after the students had had an opportunity to study the course syllabus. The SR scale was administered at midsemester, and the course performance test was administered toward the end of the semester. The data were analyzed using path analysis methodology, and *Basic Statistics System (BSS)* (Martinez-Pons, 1992) was used to carry out the analyses.

Results

The triangular correlation matrix as well and the means and standard deviations of the measures appear in Table 1, and the path analysis outcomes appear in Figure 2. Although, as expected, significant correlations emerged among *multiple role conflict (MRC), perceived ability to cope with multiple role conflict (PAC), subject anxiety (SA)* and *academic self-efficacy (SE)*, the effects of PAC and SA on SE proved spurious once those of MRC were statistically removed. Moreover, the effect of MRC on *self-regulation (SR)* proved to be wholly through mediation of *self-efficacy*. Thus, a single path led from MRC to *academic performance*, and the simplified model appearing in Figure 2 omits the PAC and *SA* variables (the Pearson correlation and path coefficients are the same in any structure thattakes this single-path form). A good fit for the reduced model emerged, $X^2(3) = 1.9$, $p = .59$.

As hypothesized, *self-regulation* (SR) exerted a positive effect on *course performance (CP)*, $r = .34$, $p < .05$; and SE proved to exert a positive effect on SR, $r = .43$, $p < .05$. Of particular interest, however, MRC proved to exert a significant *negative* effect on SE, $r = -.48$, $p < .05$. These findings point to important issues regarding cognitive (reported self-efficacy, self-regulation) and behavioral (academic performance) consequences

of multiple social role conflict among adult students. Clearly, the greater the conflict they experience in dealing with multiple roles, the less self-efficacious they feel regarding their academic performance -- an effect that places an important impediment in the chain of cognitive events leading to academic achievement.

To our knowledge, this is the first time that the effects of *conflict* in managing multiple roles has been examined within the context of psychological processes associated with an observable outcome measure of personal functioning such as academic performance. The research paradigm used proved revealing concerning these dynamics. We recommend that the same paradigm, using SE and SR as integral parts of the design, be used to explore ways in which adult learners can cope with conflict associated with multiple roles as they strive to function in the academic setting.

References

Baruch, G. & Barnett, R (1986). role quality, multiple role involvement, and psychological well-being in midlife women. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **51**, 578-585.

Goode, W. (1960). A theory of role strain. *American Sociological Review*, **25**, 483-496.

Marlow, C. (1993). Coping with multiple roles: Family configuration and the need for workplace services. *Affilia*, **8**, 4-55.

Merton, R. (1968). *Social theory and social structure*. New York: Free Press.

Piechowski, L.D. (1992). Mental health and women's multiple roles. *Families in Society*, **73**, 131-141.

Pietromonaco, P.R., Manis, J. & Frohardt, L.K. (1986). Psychological consequences of multiple social roles. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, **10**, 373-381.

Sarason, S.B., Lighthall, F.F., Davidson, K.S., Waite, R.R. & Ruebush, B.K. (1960). *Anxiety in elementary school children*. New York: Wiley.

Sprietzer, E., Snyder, E.E. & Larson, D.L. (1979). Multiple roles and psychological well-being. *Sociological Focus*, **12**, 141-148.

Verbrugge, L.M. (1983). Multiple roles and physical health in women and men. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, **24**, 16-30.

Waldron, I. (1989). Effects of multiple roles on women's health-- evidence from a national longitudinal study. *Women and Health*, **15**, 3-19.

Zimmerman, B.J., Bandura, A. & Martinez-Pons, M. (1992). Self-motivation for academic achievement: The role of self-efficacy beliefs and personal goal setting. *American Educational Research Journal*, **29**, 663-676.

Table 1. *Triangular Correlation Matrix, Means and Standard Deviations*

Variable	Correlations						*M*	*SD*
	1							
1. Multiple Role Conflict (MRC)	1.00	2					4.09	1.80
2. Coping with MRC	-.42	1.00	3				5.66	1.07
3. Subject Anxiety	.35	-.34	1.00	4			37.63	9.06
4. Subject Self-Efficacy	-.48	.21	-.23	1.00	5		56.84	11.67
5. Self-Regulation	-.26	.18	.03	.43	1.00	6	70.69	6.70
6. Course Performance	-.02	.11	.15	-.07	.34	1.00	1.09	.30

Figure 1. *Theoretical Model*

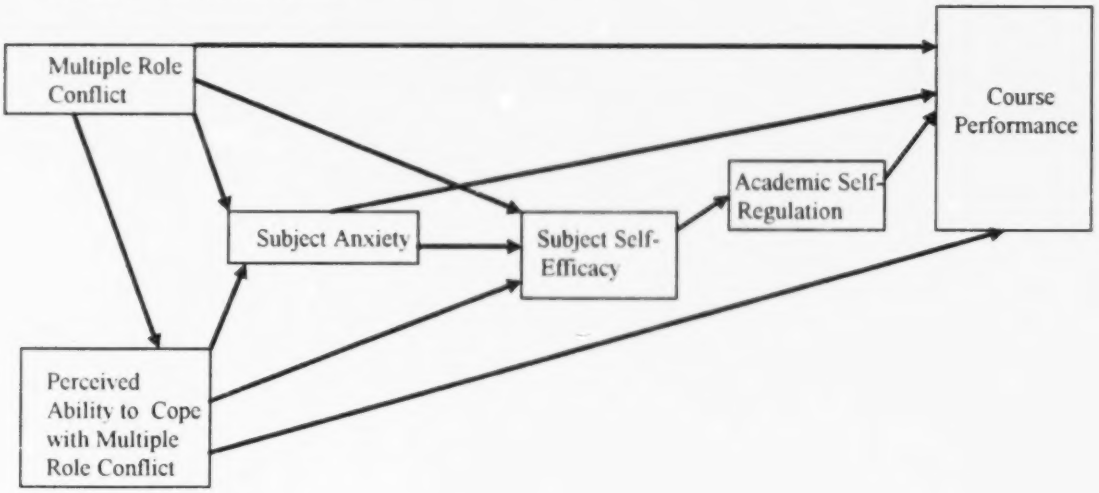
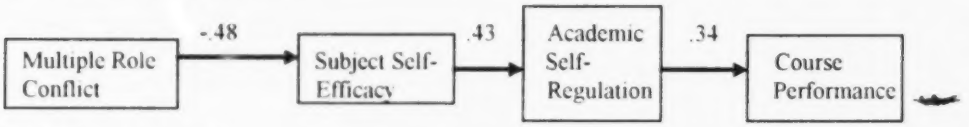


Figure 2. *Path Analysis Outcomes*



Chi Sq(3) = 1.9, p = .59

Table 1. ***Triangular Correlation Matrix, Means and Standard Deviations***

Variable	Correlations						*M*	*SD*
	1							
1. Multiple Role Conflict (MRC)	1.00	2					4.09	1.80
2. Coping with MRC	-.42	1.00	3				5.66	1.07
3. Subject Anxiety	.35	-.34	1.00	4			37.63	9.06
4. Subject Self-Efficacy	-.48	.21	-.23	1.00	5		56.84	11.67
5. Self-Regulation	-.26	.18	.03	.43	1.00	6	70.69	6.70
6. Course Performance	-.02	.11	.15	-.07	.34	1.00	1.09	.30

Figure 1. ***Theoretical Model***

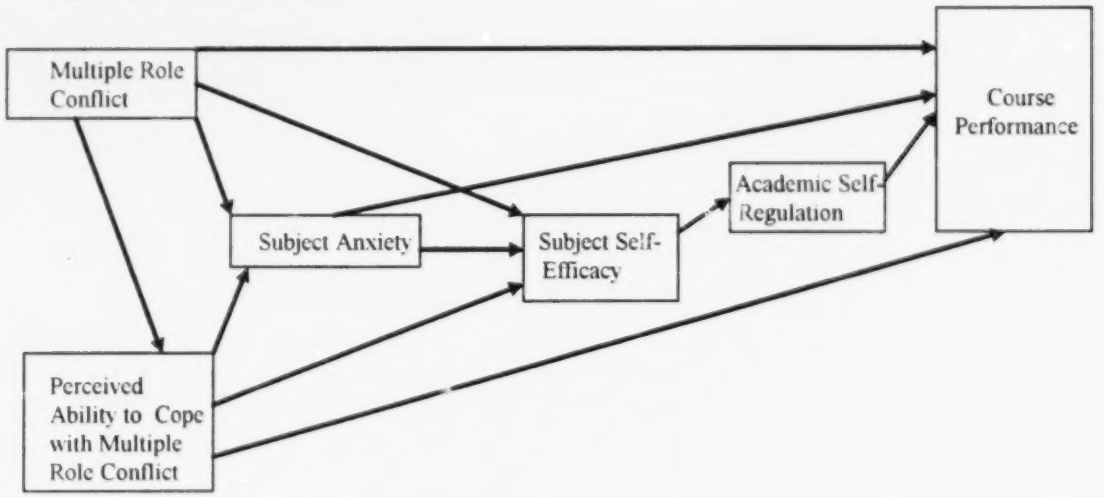
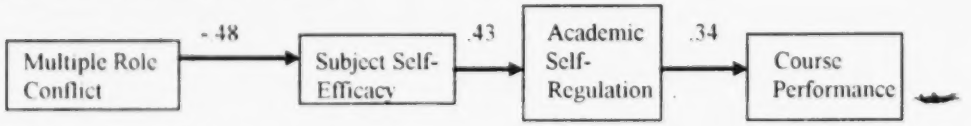


Figure 2. ***Path Analysis Outcomes***



Chi Sq(3) = 1.9, p = .59